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UNCLAS LIMA 000123

DEPT FOR CA/FPP
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SUBJECT: Smugglers Already Targeting Korean VWP Travel

¶1. SUMMARY: On January 21, 2009, the Peruvian National Police (PNP) arrested eight PRC nationals for allegedly planning to smuggle Chinese asylum-seekers to the U.S. with phony Japanese passports. A raid of the ring's "labs" in Lima suggests they were also targeting Korea's VWP program, by concocting Korean passports and Korean immigration stamps. The scheme, running since September 2008, poses PRC nationals as Visa Waiver Travelers transiting the U.S. on their way back to Asia. Once at the U.S. Port of Entry (POE), they request asylum with their real PRC passports. END SUMMARY.

The Bust

¶2. A reliable contact within the PNP said that a tip-off started the investigation, which led to the raid of two houses in Lima. Of the eight detained PRC nationals, six are presumed to be current asylum seekers. The other two are the alleged ring-leader, Chinese-Peruvian Jin Gui Zheng who was born in Fujian province in 1971, and an assistant. Also found was 11,700 USD in cash; equipment to forge immigration stamps from Peru, Argentina, Panama, Guatemala, and Korea; and phony passports from Japan, Korea, and Peru. Embassy note: although this current group was being disguised as Japanese, the ring was also apparently targeting Korea's VWP program. End note. Some passports were enhanced with fake immigration stamps from Peru, Japan, and Argentina. Phone records suggest the group had contacts in Hong Kong, Ecuador, Argentina, Brazil, and Bolivia.

The Route

¶3. The PRC nationals would start their journey by flying to visa-free Ecuador, and then transiting overland from Ecuador to Peru where they receive the passports. They originally flew to the U.S. from Lima, but once that route began presenting obstacles from Peruvian Immigration, they would travel overland again to leave from Bolivia, Brazil, and sometimes Argentina. During the flight to the U.S. they would destroy the phony passports, and present their PRC passports at the POE.

¶4. Post Comment: There is no information at this point whether the aliens in this smuggling ring registered with ESTA or not. End Comment.

McKinley